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XXIX

BATTLE HYMN

(The Story Behind *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*)

by

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About the Author and His Story

Charles Eugene Claghorn is the author of a BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN MUSIC, Parker Publishing Company, New York, Publication date: January 1974. The dictionary contains over 5,000 concise biographies of American composers, lyricists, musicians and singers from the 17th century to the present day, and also includes 750 hymnists, composers and compilers of church music.

Mr. Claghorn has been researching material on THE BATTLE HYMN through several years. His manuscript has been reviewed and approved by Dr. George Litch Knight, an authority on this hymn, by Dr. Leonard Ellenwood, Editor of the forth-coming "Dictionary of American Hymnology", and other members of the Executive Committee of the Hymn Society of America, its publishers.

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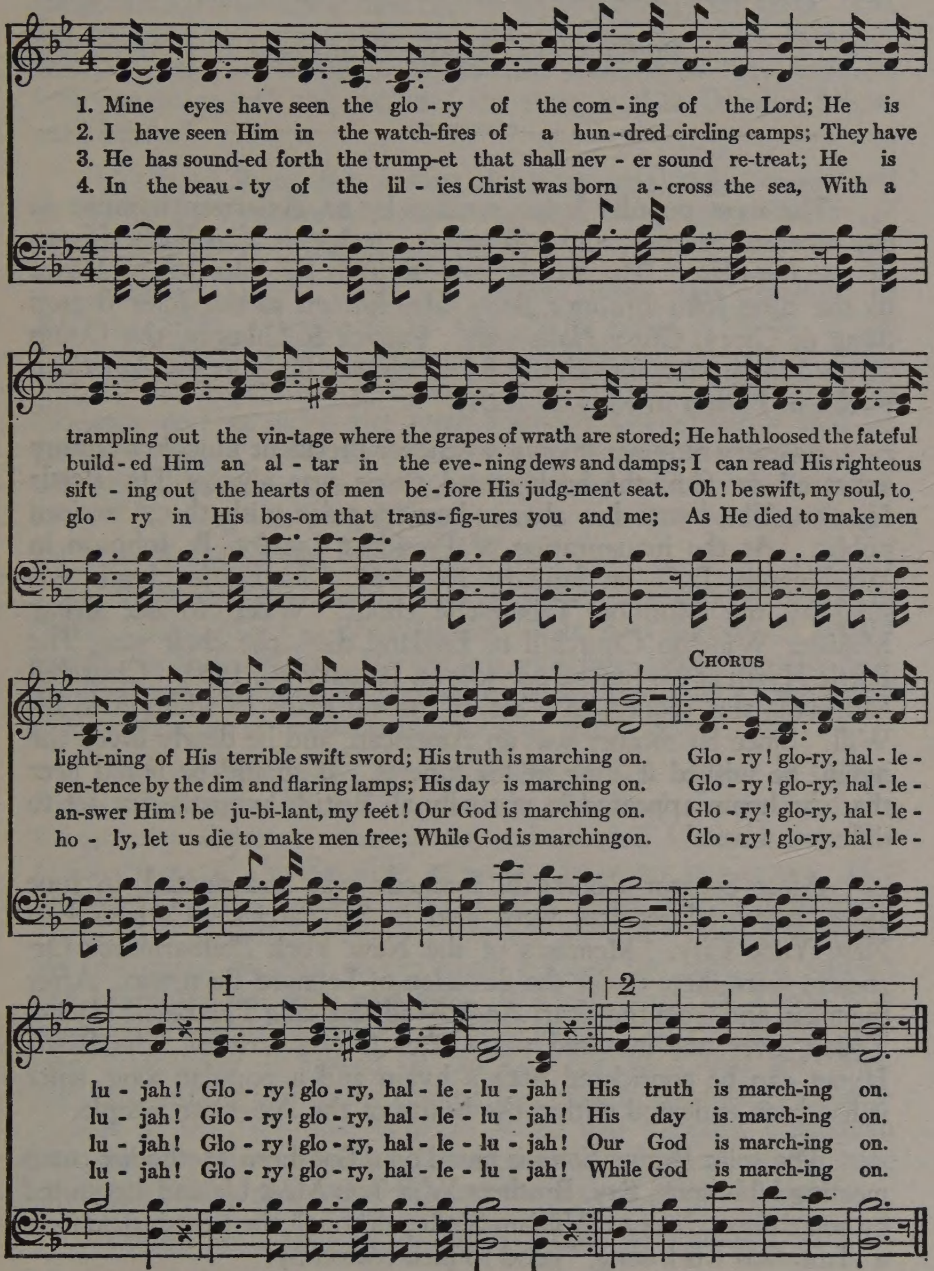
MINE EYES HAVE SEEN THE GLORY

BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC Irregular

JULIA WARD HOWE, 1861 WILLIAM STEPPE


1. Mine eyes have seen the glo - ry of the com - ing of the Lord; He is
2. I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hun - dred circling camps; They have
3. He has sound-ed forth the trump-et that shall nev - er sound re-treat; He is
4. In the beau - ty of the lil - ies Christ was born a - cross the sea, With a
trampling out the vin-tage where the grapes of wrath are stored; He hath loosed the fateful
build - ed Him an al - tar in the eve - ning dews and damps; I can read His righteous
sift - ing out the hearts of men be - fore His judg-ment seat. Oh! be swift, my soul, to
glo - ry in His bos-om that trans - fig-ures you and me; As He died to make men
CHORUS
light-ning of His terrible swift sword; His truth is marching on. Glo - ry! glo-ry, hal - le -
sen-tence by the dim and flaring lamps; His day is marching on. Glo - ry! glo-ry, hal - le -
an-swer Him! be ju-bi-lant, my feet! Our God is marching on. Glo - ry! glo-ry, hal - le -
ho - ly, let us die to make men free; While God is marching on. Glo - ry! glo-ry, hal - le -
1
2
lu - jah! Glo - ry! glo - ry, hal - le - lu - jah! His truth is march-ing on.
lu - jah! Glo - ry! glo - ry, hal - le - lu - jah! His day is march-ing on.
lu - jah! Glo - ry! glo - ry, hal - le - lu - jah! Our God is march-ing on.
lu - jah! Glo - ry! glo - ry, hal - le - lu - jah! While God is march-ing on.

BATTLE HYMN:

(The Story Behind *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*)

By Charles Eugene Claghorn

The most popular hymn written by an American hymnist in the nineteen century, and still popular today, is *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. The words were written by Julia Ward Howe to the tune *John Brown's Body,* also known as the *John Brown Song* or *Glory, Glory Hallelujah*. Patrick S. Gilmore, the Union Army bandmaster, introduced *John Brown's Body* to the American public in Boston in May of 1861.

As every oldtimer knows, whenever President Lincoln's picture appeared on film, the background music was always *The Battle Hymn*. The hymn has always been popular with the American public. At the inauguration of President Lyndon B. Johnson in Washington, D.C. on January 20, 1965, *The Battle Hymn* was sung by the Mormon Tabernacle choir. When former Prime Minister Winston Churchill of England died, the choir sang *The Battle Hymn* at his funeral services on January 30, 1965. Churchill had made this request in a set of funeral plans in addition to his Will. Since his mother was an American, and he dearly loved the hymn, he wished it sung at his funeral. It should be noted here that the hymn appeared in virtually all British hymnals, but set to different music.[7]

After Senator Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated, in June 1968, memorial services were held in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. Members of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra were there under the direction of Leonard Bernstein. After the mass, and from the altar, Andy Williams sang *The Battle Hymn*. Today, over one hundred years after it was written, *The Battle Hymn* can be considered both a hymn and a popular song, since it has been endeared within the hearts of the American people.

The *John Brown Song* is based on a Southern Methodist camp meeting bible song, *Say, Brothers Will You Meet Us* and attributed by some researchers to William Steffe, although the tune is definitely a plantation work song, "good to pick cotton by."

Private James Beale, who was stationed at Fort Warren, Charlestown, Boston Harbor, Massachusetts in 1861, stated that in the 1850's a fire company in Charleston, South Carolina, commissioned a Philadelphia musician to write a chanty for them. The fire company received a song with the opening lines "Say, bummers will you meet us" which the Methodists changed to "Say, brothers will you meet us" and included the song in their Sunday School song books.[1]

Credit to Steffe for writing the song apparently comes from an article by Brander Matthews on Civil War songs which appeared in Century Magazine in 1885.

Sometime ago I contacted Edwin Steffe, the grandson of William Steffe, who wrote to me: "The name of Steffe is not a widespread one. My father's name was Charles Alexander Steffe and he was a musician in Baltimore, Maryland. I followed in his footsteps and attended the same Peabody Conservatory that he attended, albeit, I became a concert artist and for twelve years was under the management of Arthur Judson's office with Columbia artists. During this period I appeared in over 700 concerts (solo) throughout the United States and Canada. . . .

"William Steffe was the organist and choirmaster of the Indian Fields Camp Meeting Festivals that were held anually in Indian Fields, South Carolina. He wrote a marching hymn entitled 'Say, Brothers will you meet us' and some musical researchers have found this hymn to be the basis in form of *The Battle Hymn*. . . .

"A number of years ago I was singing in a concert in Dillon, South Carolina. At the intermission, the local chairman of the Community Concerts came to me and asked if I would sing *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* as an encore in my last group. Her reasons for asking me were this: William Steffe was a native South Carolinian. I demurred on the subject because *The Battle Hymn* fell into great disfavor in the south because the northern soldiers had taken up the tune and sang 'We will hang Jeff Davis to a sour apple tree' to these same bars of music. So you see my concern. However, I agreed on the one condition that she, Mrs. Hendrix, appear before the singing and explain the historical background of the fact that William Steffe was a South Carolinian and did play at the Indian Fields camp meetings where the tune originated. She did, and I did, and we got out of town safely. . . .

"While on a tour in Australia I had the privilege, at their

request, of singing this stirring hymn with both the Melbourne Symphony and the Adelaide Symphony. Our Melbourne audience was 45,000 people and our Adelaide audience (a candle-lighting festival at Christmas) over 100,000 people. At specific request in the Will of Winston Churchill the hymn was played at his funeral. It has served as the rallying point of many causes."

Annual summer meetings of the Indian Fields Camp Meetings are held at Indian Fields camp ground, about three miles north of St. George, near Highway 15. Although a Methodist institution, under control of the South Carolina Conference, it attracts people of all faiths.

The *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* of September 30, 1956 stated: "The camp meeting began on this historic site in 1848 when a tract of land was deeded to a board of trustees for this specific purpose. It has continued without interruption each year down to the present. Although the records are lacking, the institution is known to have had a much earlier beginning. Francis Ashbury, itinerant bishop of the early Methodist Church, records in his diary that he preached at Indian Fields on December 21, 1801."[2]

Later I talked with Mr. Edwin Steffe on the telephone, and Mr. Steffe said that while his mother was of Pennsylvania Dutch extraction and part of the Dunker sect of the German Baptist Brethren, his father was of Italian descent, and that the family name was originally di Stefano, which could account for Edwin Steffe's fine baritone voice and career as a soloist.

Author Fuld states that the earliest known publication of the song appeared as "My brother will you meet me" in Charles Dunbar's *The Union Harp & Revival Chorister,* Cincinnati (1858). In later editions the song appeared as "Say, brothers will you meet us", and was copyrighted with this title by G. S. Scofield, New York, on November 27, 1858.[3] The arrangement for *Say Brothers* is credited by some researchers to Franklin H. Lummis.

While William Steffe was reported as being born near Charleston, South Carolina, he apparently moved to Philadelphia, since his name appears in the City Directories there in 1856 and in subsequent years.

Although it was stated that "Say, bummers" or "Say, brothers" was written by a Philadelphian for a Charleston, South Carolina

fire company, the tune is truly southern. A librarian wrote me: "You must remember that the tune we are speaking of is so simple and repetitious that it is hardly possible to speak of 'writing it'; rather it's a question of inventing it, spontaneously or otherwise, to go with the appropriate words and metric pattern. This particular pattern of A-A-A-B was quite popular and simply 'in the air' in the 1840's and 1850's."[4]

"From all indications of the word patterns, the meter, and rhythm, we are of the opinion that this original song is a 'work song' or plantation air — for example, very useful to pick cotton by."[5] So it could have originated as a Negro spiritual. In any event, the origin of the tune *The Battle Hymn* must have been a plantation work song.

The tune was used for *John Brown's Body,* which song originated at Fort Warren, and is described in detail by Private Beale.[1] Early in 1861 the only outfit stationed at Fort Warren was the 2nd Battalion of Massachusetts Infantry, known as the Tiger Battalion. In the Battalion was a quartet of four sergeants named Charles E. B. Edgerly, James H. Jenkins, Newton J. Purnette and John Brown which sang at various functions. John Brown was originally from Scotland. The 12th Massachusetts Volunteers arrived at the Fort on May 7, 1861. This was the Webster Regiment.

John Brown, the famous abolitionist, who led the raid on the arsenal at Harper's Ferry in western Virginia (now West Virginia) was hanged in December, 1859, and became famous for his efforts in trying to free the slaves.

Sergeant John Brown at Fort Warren was the butt of many jokes, such as "he looks well for a dead man!" or "He has a lively gait for a corpse." According to Beale, one evening when the quartet of the Tiger Battalion was returning to the Fort, the query from someone was "What's the news?" Promptly came the reply "John Brown's dead." Then someone added "Yet the stiff goes marching 'round." Adapting the tune *Say Brothers,* the first three men of the quartet sang "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave, his soul goes marching on."

Beale reports that the Chaplains liked to call the volunteers "the Army of the Lord." So the three men added "He's gone to be a soldier in the army of the Lord." Since training included strapping on your knapsack in preparation for marching to battle,

they added the words "John Brown's knapsack is strapped upon his back."

Although Beale reports that they were known as Webster's cattle, soldiers were often termed "lambs," i.e., they were led to the slaughter, and every officer and sergeant had his "pet lambs." In the *New York Times* for May 21, 1861 there is a letter to the editor about the conduct of troops, which the editor headed "The President's Pet Lambs." So the threesome of the quartet added "His pet lambs will meet him on the way." As far as the verses to the song are concerned, they probably were not all sung in one day, but added from time to time.

The *John Brown Song* was still in a crude state, and according to Beale, the tune was whistled by the quartet to the Tiger bandmaster, William J. Martland, and the tune was written down by a member of the band, S. C. Perkins. Copies, still in the rough state, were given to Pat Gilmore and to the Germania Band.

Author Louis C. Elson wrote that he talked with Captain Henry J. Hallgreen, who was stationed at Fort Warren, and who stated that he heard two recruits from Maine singing *Say Brothers* and the soldiers were adding verses. Captain Hallgreen stated that Pat Gilmore frequently came to the fort with his band, and that Gilmore helped to "vamp" it, to improvise harmonies, i.e., "revamp" or arrange the tune.[6] Another writer claims that Captain Hallgreen and James E. Greenleaf assisted the quartet in writing verses, and that a Dodsworth of New York City assisted Gilmore in the arrangement. But since Captain Hallgreen himself told Elson about the soldiers singing the tune and adding verses, it is unlikely that Hallgreen had any part in it.

Some authors contend the soldiers who wrote *John Brown's Body* were either Charles S. Hall or Henry Howard Brownell, or possibly Thomas Brigham Bishop (1835-1905), with music arranged by C. B. Marsh. It so happens that Charles S. Hall and C. B. Marsh were printers at 256 Main Street, Charlestown, Massachusetts, who published the music on July 16, 1861 as a broadside and Hall copyrighted the song as the author of the words and composer of the music.[8] It was commonplace in those days for publishers to claim ownership. Even today when someone writes a book, the publisher usually obtains and holds the copyright, not the author. Under the title of the broadside appeared the words: "ORIGIN: FORT WARREN," so the printer did admit it was

not original, but was obtained from someone at the fort. So we can ignore the claims of Hall and Marsh as the lyricist and/or composer.

All the evidence seems to point to Patrick S. Gilmore as the arranger of *John Brown's Body*. After the three sergeants wrote the verses based on the tune *Say Brothers,* Beale states that copies were given to Gilmore. Captain Hallgreen stated that Gilmore frequently came to the fort with his band and helped revamp the tune and improvise harmonies. Gilmore's band played the *John Brown Song* at flag raising ceremonies in May, June and July 1861 at Fort Warren.

Patrick S. Gilmore was born in Ballyar, Galway County, Ireland in 1829 and arrived in Massachusetts in 1848 by way of Canada. He conducted a band in Salem, Massachusetts in 1848, then organized his own band in 1859. As mentioned, he played *John Brown's Body* at flag raising ceremonies at Fort Warren early in 1861. It should be noted that Gilmore's band at this time was a civilian band, and the men were not in the army. In the 1850's and 1860's he composed several songs. He wrote the music and lyrics for *Good News from Home* in 1854 and *Oh Let Me Dream of Former Years* in 1855. He wrote the lyrics for *Music Fills My Soul with Sadness* in 1856, with music by John P. Ordway, the minstrel showman.

Pat Gilmore and his entire band enlisted in the 24th Massachusetts Infantry in Boston on September 16, 1861 and they were mustered into service October 3rd by Lieutenant Pratt. They were mustered out on August 30, 1862 at New Bern, North Carolina.

When the Union forces occupied New Orleans in 1863, General Nathaniel Banks appointed Gilmore the Bandmaster of the Union Forces in the Department of the Gulf. It was at this time that Gilmore composed *When Johnny Comes Marching Home,* giving credit to Father Louis Lambert, who may have written the words, although some critics give credit to Gilmore. Father Lambert was Chaplain of the 18th Illinois Infantry. He was born in Charleroi, Pennsylvania in 1835 and was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1859 for the diocese of Alton, Illinois. It is possible that Father Lambert wrote the lyrics and Gilmore composed the music, with Gilmore giving credit to Father Lambert. Father Lambert died in 1910 at Newfoundland, New Jersey.

Pat Gilmore conducted a Band Festival in New Orleans in 1864.

He composed the music for *Freedom on the Old Plantation* in 1866, words by W. D. Smith, Jr. He organized the National Peace Jubilee in 1869 in Boston and the World Peace Jubilee in 1872 in Boston, where the Fisk University Jubilee Singers participated, singing their best loved Negro spirituals. He organized the Third World Peace Jubilee in 1873, which was his last gigantic concert.

In 1872 Gilmore became Bandmaster of the 22nd Regiment of the New York State National Guard, and led the band until his sudden death in St. Louis in 1892. He wrote two anthems, *Columbia* in 1892 and *Ireland to England*. He also wrote a song, *The Voice of the Departing Soul, or Death at the Door* which was sung at his funeral services.

Gilmore's Peace Jubilee held in June 1869 in Boston was colossal. A coliseum seating 30,000 people was erected, with the largest brass band in the world, and four organs that required relays of twelve men to pump. Ten thousand choral singers, plus an orchestra of 84 trombones, 83 tubas, 83 coronets, 75 drums, 330 strings, and 110 woodwinds, plus one hundred members of the Fire Department beating on one hundred anvils produced the loudest performance of the Anvil Chorus from *Il Trovatore* ever given. President U. S. Grant attended, unsmiling, but John S. Dwight, a leading music critic, fled the scene to escape the thunderous din!

In 1861 Gilmore's band was sent down on Saturdays for a concert and dress parade at Fort Warren. After the men sang *John Brown's Body* for him, Gilmore played it on his cornet. The song was played for the first time in public at Fort Warren by Gilmore's band at a flag raising ceremony on May 12, 1861. Then on May 25, 1861, the Tiger Battalion left Fort Warren, but the Webster Regiment remained there awhile longer. Before the Tiger Battalion left, some of the members were allowed to join the Webster Regiment, according to Beale.[1]

On July 18, 1861 the soldiers of the 12th Regiment under Colonel Fletcher Webster, preceded by the famous band of Patrick S. Gilmore, marched up State Street in Boston as the band played "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave." The public was electrified as the soldiers marched to the tune.

According to Beale the band played *John Brown's Body* again as the colors were presented by Edward Everett, a former Governor of Massachusetts, who also had been a Secretary of State and a United States Senator. While considered the leading orator of

his time, he is the same gentleman who later was the principal speaker at the dedication ceremonies at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863, and gave a long-winded speech which put many to sleep. President Lincoln's speech, which followed, was so short and to the point that it was over before anyone present realized what he had said. The audience on that day was still in a daze from Senator Everett's speech. So we suppose nobody heard what Everett said on July 18, 1861, either, since everyone was so thrilled with the *John Brown Song,* and by nightfall the tune echoed from City Point to Beacon Hill.

The 12th Massachusetts Volunteers left Boston on July 23rd, and marched down Broadway, New York City, on July 24, 1861, singing *John Brown's Body.* Again, the parade viewers were electrified by the song. Baltimore first heard it on July 26th. When the Union forces under General Benjamin Butler suffered a defeat at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, they sang *John Brown's Body* to reinforce their spirits. On March 1, 1862, in Charleston, Virginia (now West Virginia), on the spot where John Brown was hanged, the 12th Massachusetts Infantry sang *John Brown's Body.*

Beale reports that Sergeant John Brown was accidentally drowned at Fort Royal on June 6, 1862. Eventually, Webster's regiment became known as the "Hallelujah Regiment."

The 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Infantry was a black regiment. They passed in review before the Boston Common on May 28, 1863 and on their way to Battery Wharf the band played *John Brown's Body.*

In General Sherman's own account of his March to the Sea, he reports that when his men reached Shady Lane, Georgia, a short stop was made and the band played *John Brown's Body.* A number of black girls came out of their houses and formed a circle around the band and performed what looked like a ceremonial dance. Later Sherman learned that the original tune was well known as *Say, Brothers* from Negro religious camp meetings, and the black girls were afraid if they did not dance whenever it was played, they were doomed to become lifetime spinsters, according to tradition. So the tune was well known in the south, and may have originated as a Negro spiritual.

The song, *John Brown's Body,* spread like wildfire among the troops and became the marching song at the beginning of the war as the men marched southward. Many variations of the song

appeared in coarse language and the soldiers of the Union Army improvised lyrics to the catchy tune. It fell upon Julia Ward Howe to write the most inspiring words of all, and to place the song as the top popular tune of the nineteenth century. Julia Ward, born in New York City in 1819, the daughter of a banker, married Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe who was the editor of the *Boston Commonwealth,* an anti-slavery newspaper. Mrs. Howe was a pioneer suffragette, reformer, abolitionist, poet, and was recognized for her essays.

A review of the troops for the public was held at Bailey's Cross Roads, eight miles from Fairfax Court House, Virginia, on November 20, 1861. Present were General George B. McClellan, known as "Little Mac" in popular songs, his staff, President Lincoln, members of the Cabinet and other dignitaries. Also present were Julia Ward Howe, her husband, Dr. Samuel G. Howe, and the Reverend James Freeman Clarke, who had left Boston on November 12th and traveled to Washington, D.C. with Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts.

After attending the review, and riding back to Washington in their carriage, they heard soldiers singing *John Brown's Body.* Reverend Clarke suggested to Mrs. Howe that she write new words to the tune. Late that night, while lying in bed in her room in the Willard Hotel in Washington, Julia received an inspiration. She jumped out of bed and scribbled on a piece of paper the words "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." Then she sat up the rest of the night, and by candlelight, completed her poem.

The editor of the *Atlantic Monthly,* James T. Fields, accepted her poem for publication and paid her five dollars. The poem appeared in the February 1862 issue, but Fields didn't bother to list Julia Ward Howe as the poetess. An advance copy of the poem appeared in the January 14, 1862 issue of the *New York Daily Tribune.*[3] There was a sixth stanza which Mrs. Howe deleted in the *Atlantic Monthly* issue, but which appears in many British hymnals.[7] The first printing of *The Battle Hymn* to the music of the *John Brown Song* was copyrighted as *Glory, Hallelujah* on April 9, 1862 by Oliver Ditson & Co. of Boston. Sometime later *The Battle Hymn* appeared in army hymnals, and the new version became extremely popular. Julia Ward Howe died in Middletown, Rhode Island, in 1910, at the grand old age of 91.

At the age of nine Teresa Carreno was a world-famed piano prodigy. She was born in Caracas, Venezuela in 1853. Early in 1863 she played in the White House for President Lincoln, and he told her he knew only two tunes, *Listen to the Mocking Bird* (written by Septimus Winner, 1827-1902), a Philadelphian, in 1855) and *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. She played *Listen to the Mocking Bird,* with variations, for the President, but fussed badly because the piano was out of tune, and never did get to play *The Battle Hymn*.

Charles C. McCabe was known as the singing chaplain during the Civil War, and he did much to promote *The Battle Hymn*. McCabe was born in Athens, Ohio in 1836 and was graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio. In 1862 he was appointed Chaplain of the 122nd Ohio Regiment of Volunteers. He was captured in June 1863 at Winchester, Virginia, and imprisoned at Libby Prison in Richmond, Virginia. After his release, while at the Christian Commission meeting in February, 1864, attended by President Lincoln,McCabe sang *The Battle Hymn,* and the President so dearly loved the song that he requested McCabe to sing it again.

In January, 1865, at another meeting of the commission, McCabe again sang *The Battle Hymn,* and President Lincoln along with others joined in the chorus. At the funeral services for the President, in Springfield, Illinois in May, 1865, McCabe sang *The Battle Hymn*. In 1896 McCabe was elected a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. *The Battle Hymn* was sung at McCabe's funeral services in 1906 in Evanston, Illinois.

From the simple beginning of *Say, Brothers,* which may have been written by William Steffe, but more likely by a black cotton picker on a southern plantation, there evolved *John Brown's Body* with lyrics written by three sergeants at Fort Warren, Massachusetts and introduced to the public by bandmaster Patrick S. Gilmore, into *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* with words by Julia Ward Howe and popularized by Charles C. McCabe, winning the hearts of President Lincoln, Prime Minister Churchill and millions of Americans.

Notes:

[1] A *Famous War Song* by James Beale, privately printed and limited to 100 copies, Philadelphia 1894.

[2] Copy of the *South Carolina Methodist Advocate* sent to the author by Herbert Hucks, Jr., Archivist of the Historical Society of the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, Wofford College Library, Spartanburg, South Carolina.

[3] *The Book of World Famous Music* by James J. Fuld, Crown Publishers, New York 1971.

[4] Letter from William Lichtenwanger, Head, Reference Section, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[5] Letter from Miss Judy Coffey, at the suggestion of Stewart Lillard, Reference Librarian of the Baptist Historical Collection, Furman University Library, Greenville, South Carolina.

[6] *The History of American Music* by Louis C. Elson, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1904.

[7] Per telephone call from the Reverend George L. Knight, pastor of the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn, New York.

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